



REPUBLICAN LAND POLICY—HOMES FOR THE MILLION.

Give the Public Lands to the People, and you settle the Slavery Question, obliterate the Frontiers, dispense with a Standing Army, and extinguish Mormonism.

SPEECH

OF

HON. STEPHEN C. FOSTER,

OF MAINE.

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Speech of Mr. Foster.

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Mr. FOSTER said :

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The proper disposition to be made of the public lands has been, from the origin of the Government, a subject of grave interest, upon which the great parties of the day have been divided. The treaty of 1783, by which Great Britain acknowledged the independence of her revolted colonies, fixed the western limits of the Confederacy at the Mississippi river. At that day, the whole valley of the great river was an unbroken wilderness; and, indeed, the settlements were almost confined to the belt of land near the sea-shore. The western portions of the now old States were, at that period, as wild and as unknown to civilized man as the Rocky Mountain regions are to us to-day. If we look at the modern maps of the United States, the area included within the original limits of the Union will appear small; but the proportion of land to the number of the inhabitants was, at the commencement of our national existence, far greater than it is at the present time. We have made vast acquisitions of territory, but the increase of population has outstripped territorial expansion in a fourfold degree.

This single comparison illustrates the immense progress which the country has made in subduing the wilderness, and subjecting it to the uses of civilized life. It also gives promise of still greater and more rapid victories of peace and industry in the near future. Within the space of a lifetime, our population has advanced from the Atlantic slope of the Alleghenies, in compact array of States, to the western frontiers of Missouri and Iowa. We have planted States on the Pacific, and, interspersed between these disjointed parts of the Confederacy, we have planted colonies, numbering tens of thousands of intelligent freemen, which, under the fostering care of the Federal Government, are destined to become States, and to complete the chain of civilization from ocean to ocean.

In my judgment, the Government of the Union is called upon, by every consideration of humanity and expediency, to encourage the settlement of the Territories as rapidly as possible. We now have two frontiers exposed to the predatory attacks of savage Indians. The States on this side of the continent have a western frontier; the States on the Pacific have an eastern frontier. From whatever cause it may happen—whether from the warlike habits of the Indians, or from the unjust encroachments of white men upon these children of the forest—we know that a state of almost perpetual hostility exists between the people of the frontiers and the savage tribes. This state of things will become worse and worse, so long as the Territories remain wild and unsettled, and the Indians continue their savage customs.

In view of what has been accomplished during the last eighty years, from small beginnings, and with small means, we hazard little in the prediction that the whole of our Territories may, within twenty years more, become organized and compactly-settled States. Eighty years ago, our population was three million. It is now more than thirty million. Within that period, those three million and their descendants, together with immigrants from Europe, have settled and subdued a wilderness larger than that which now remains in its wild state. Cannot thirty-odd million, backed by an increasing tide of European immigration, accomplish as much within the next two decades as three million accomplished in eighty years? Is it too much to anticipate the obliteration of our frontiers within that period?

If we consult merely economical considerations, it seems to me that the Federal Government is bound to pursue a policy which will facilitate the speedy settlement of the Territories. Why do we keep a standing army of twenty thousand men, at a cost of \$20,000,000 per annum? It is not to protect the people of

the United States from aggression upon each other. It is not to defend them against the assaults of the great Powers of the earth. It is well understood that our immense and rapidly-growing commerce is our best protection against the really formidable nations of the earth. They cannot afford to go to war with us; our trade is too important, too necessary to their prosperity, to permit the idea of war. We fear nothing from abroad, nothing from domestic insurrection or revolution. Why, then, I repeat, do we keep a standing army at a cost of \$20,000,000 per annum? The reason is obvious. It is to prevent the roving bands of Indians in the Territories from preying upon the frontier settlers. These Indian savages are few in numbers, but their trade is war, and their means of subsistence altogether precarious. They are not engaged in cultivating the earth, nor even in pastoral pursuits. Their habits are those of mere savages, and their pursuits, hunting, fishing, and war. When the first two fail them, they resort to the third. They rob caravans, they murder and despoil emigrants, and they attack settlements.

Now, sir, there is but one remedy for these Indian depredations; and that is, the purchase and settlement of their lands. This can be accomplished in a very few years, if the policy of the Federal Government is made to conform to the natural tendency of American population. Let us aid and encourage the settlement of the Territories, by granting the public lands to actual settlers. The actual settlers are the men who make the new States; it is their labor which confers value upon the lands; they make marts for the commerce and manufactures of the older States, and they are entitled to the lands. Pass this bill, and every foot of our Territories will, within twenty years, be as secure against Indian depredations as Ohio and Kentucky are to-day.

But what is to become of the Indians? I would not ignore their rights. Far from it. I would be more just and kind to them than this Government or people have ever been. But I deny the right of a handful of savages to monopolize a continent, when millions of men, more intelligent and better every way, need homes. I would pay the Indians liberally for their lands, and secure to them and their posterity perpetual homesteads, and I would extend to them every facility for learning the arts of civilized life. Above all, their present vagabond and destructive habits of hunting and war should be broken up. They should be assigned a permanent home, and confined to it. They can never become civilized until they become fixed to the soil, and learn to live by its cultivation. They are now scattered over a million of square miles of territory, and are nevertheless dying for want of the comforts of life. A hundredth part of that space, if cultivated, would support ten times their number.

I say, therefore, let the Indians be cared for;

let their condition be made tenfold better, morally and physically; but let the wild lands on which they roam be given to civilized men, who will cultivate and subdue them. The people and Government of the United States have fallen far short of their duty to the Indian tribes, but their fault consists in not taking sufficient pains to civilize and Christianize them. I know that honest efforts are being made to that end, and that they are crowned with the promise of success, but we have fallen far short of our duty. The worst thing that can happen for the Indians is to permit them to continue their present habits of war and hunting, to the neglect of agriculture. I repeat, that the speedy settlement of the Territories is the only remedy for a state of continual war with these savages, attended with the expense of a large and growing standing army.

There is another evil which the remoteness and wildness of our immense Territories has fostered into fearful importance. I allude to polygamy, that foulest product of the nineteenth century, which seems to denote a decline in civilization. Mormonism, we are aware, sprung up in the older States, but polygamy was unheard of until the Saints removed beyond the reach of civilization. In Missouri and Illinois, that fanatical and persecuted sect was suspected of some practices inconsistent with morality; but it was not until they felt themselves secure in the mountain fastnesses of Utah, a thousand miles beyond the frontiers of civilization, that they threw off all disguise, and shocked the moral sense of the country and the world by the open practice of polygamy. They feel secure from molestation in that remote and not easily-accessible region. We know what their history has been. They have publicly defied the Government. They have trampled on the laws of Congress, and, notwithstanding that millions of money have been spent in sending an army to subdue them, they still revel in licentiousness, insult your judges, mock your army, and murder your citizens.

Sir, it was but the other day that a bill was introduced in this body for the abolition of polygamy. It met my hearty support. I had no constitutional doubt or scruple about voting to suppress a practice which is a felony at common law, and an insult to decency and morality. The fact that a practice so monstrous has sprung up in one of the organized Territories of the Union proves the necessity of a general law to prohibit it, not only in Utah, but in all the Territories. But who is to put the law in force in Utah? There the institution of polygamy has been permitted to grow up to such proportions as to defy suppression by any ordinary legal process. The whole population sustain and practice it, or desire to practice it. Who is to put the law in force? The Mormons? Have we no experience of the integrity of Mormon sheriffs and juries? Have they not screened or acquitted

the most heinous murderers, who murdered in the cause of polygamy? And are they the men to put in force your law which abolishes their favorite institution? Sir, it is idle to expect such a thing.

The only way to render the abolition of polygamy effectual is to encourage the settlement of the Territories as rapidly as possible. To effect this result, no plan could be better devised than the homestead bill which lately passed this body, but which, I fear, is doomed to hang up for a long time in the other wing of the Capitol, if it ever passes that body. If such a law were passed, a very few years would suffice to fill the Territories with population, and to overwhelm the polygamists of Utah beneath the advancing tread of Christian civilization.

Another remedy has been suggested for polygamy, namely: the division of the Territory of Utah, and the annexation of its parts to the adjacent States and Territories. But this plan, it seems to me, would be as inadequate as the other, without the homestead law to fill the vacant lands with population. What, for instance, would the polygamists of Salt Lake care for the legislative anathemas adopted at Lecompton, a thousand miles east; or at Salem, a thousand miles northwest; or at Sacramento, equally far southwest; or at Santa Fé, beyond the interminable and almost impassable ranges of the Rocky Mountains? Is it not apparent that such a scheme would be even less effective than the simple act for the abolition of polygamy which has been adopted in this body?

Sir, there are three measures of Republican policy which admirably harmonize with each other, and co-operate for the common defence and the general welfare of the Union. These are, the homestead for actual settlers on the public lands, the construction of a Pacific railroad, and the suppression of polygamy. The most effectual way to bring about this last result is to adopt the other two. It is to be hoped that a bill for the construction of a Pacific railroad will be adopted during the present session of Congress. This Congress has it in its power to make itself memorable, through all coming time, by the inauguration of the Homestead and the Pacific railroad. They should go together, because they will mutually assist each other. The railroad will make the lands more desirable to settlers, and the settlers will make the construction of the road easier, and add to its utility when completed.

These two great measures, if adopted, would develop the resources of the country; they would people the wilderness, and convert it into smiling fields and peaceful homes for millions of Christian families. This influx of population, as I have pointed out, is the only sure remedy for polygamy; and thus three seemingly independent measures are so intimately blended in their beneficent consequences as to appear parts of one common policy.

But there are other consequences which must result from these great measures. I have already alluded to one of first-rate importance. By the settlement of the public lands, the frontiers will be obliterated, Indian wars will be abolished, and a large standing army rendered unnecessary. There is still another incidental benefit which must flow from the passage of these important measures. It addresses itself peculiarly to Southern men. They are bitterly hostile to the old Jeffersonian policy of excluding slavery from the Territories; and for a generation past, the very pivot on which their politics has turned has been this question of the power of Congress over slavery in the Territories. The most effectual remedy for the evil of which they complain is to be found in the transformation of the Territories into States.

Now, all that I have said goes to prove that the most speedy way to make this transformation is the passage of the homestead bill, and I will add, as its complement, a bill for the construction of the Pacific railroad. The first of these measures has already passed this body; and if the Southern members are really anxious to banish slavery agitation from the Halls of Congress, they should exert their utmost influence to secure its passage through the Senate, and its ratification by the President. I hazard little in the prediction that the Republican party will never be called upon to prohibit slavery in the Territories, if this homestead bill shall become a law; and especially if it be accompanied by a bill for the construction of a Pacific railroad. For, before the Republicans secure a majority in the other branch of Congress, the homestead and the railroad will have practically settled the question by filling the Territories with people. Before the Republicans obtain power in all branches of the Government, they will find that their work has been done by the voluntary action of the people in the formation of State Governments.

Now, would not this be better than to keep up the agitation in Congress, and run the risk of bringing the Wilmot proviso upon you? Will you not join us in superseding the Wilmot proviso, by the passage of the homestead and the Pacific railroad bills?

We learn from the reports of the Secretary of the Interior, that the Government had, up to September 30, 1859, disposed of 380,000,000 acres of land. Of this vast aggregate, only 147,000,000 acres, or a little more than one-third, had been sold for cash; while 241,000,000 acres were donated to individuals, corporations, and States. The old parties have had their separate and conflicting policies in regard to the proper disposition of the public lands, but neither policy has prevailed. The Whig policy was to divide the proceeds of sales among the States. This was never done but in one instance, when some twenty million dollars were donated to the States, if I am not mistaken, under the form of a loan or deposit. That measure was never re-

garbled with general favor, and some of the States for a long period refused to receive their distributive shares. The Democratic policy was, to put the proceeds of the land sales into the Treasury, and disburse them as ordinary revenue, thus saving the necessity of taxation to that amount. This scheme may appear very plausible to the lovers of economy, who happen not to be acquainted with Democratic practice; but the above statement, from official sources, must open the eyes of all such persons to the true state of the case. Only about one-third of the lands disposed of have been sold for cash; the remaining two-thirds have been given away. But it must not be supposed that the one-third sold has brought \$1.25 per acre into the Treasury. Far from it. Out of the proceeds of sale must be taken the whole expense of surveys and sales, and of the Land Office bureau. When these expenses are deducted, the actual clear receipts into the Treasury will scarcely reach \$100,000,000.

I will not undertake to say that the two thirds of the public lands, which have been given away, have been improperly disposed of. I admit that the bounties to soldiers, and the grants for purposes of education, have been generally well bestowed. It may be admitted, also, that the grants for railroad purposes have generally tended to promote the welfare of the new States, although they have, at the same time, more immediately benefited the wealthy few engaged in the construction of the roads. The mass of the people have come in for incidental benefits; but the donations of the Government have been made to the wealthy classes. Thus, while the country is amused and cheated with the idea which the Democratic party has ever held up to view—that the public lands are to be sold, and their proceeds put into the Treasury, in order to save the necessity of taxation—they are, in fact, voted away by millions of acres to States and corporations. This practice of giving away the public lands is becoming the general rule, and selling them the exception. A brief quotation from the last annual report of the Secretary of the Interior will illustrate this remark:

"During the five quarters ending 30th September, 1859, (says the Secretary,) 16,618,183 acres of public lands were disposed of; 1,970,500 acres were sold for cash, yielding \$2,107,476; 3,617,419 acres were located with bounty land warrants; 1,712,040 acres were approved to the several States entitled to them under the swamp grants of March 2, 1849, and September 28, 1850; and 6,318,203 acres certified to States as falling to them under the grants for railroad purposes."

So that, of near seventeen million acres disposed of, only 1,970,500 acres were sold at the reduced or graduated price, and brought only \$2,107,476! Out of this sum, the expense of surveying and selling is to be taken, and the residue is the fruit of the Democratic policy.

But for the law which allows lands which have been exposed to sale for a certain number of years to be entered at reduced prices, the actual sales of the last fiscal year would have constituted a minute fraction of the amount disposed of.

Now, sir, the country is growing tired of this mockery. Whatever honest and unsophisticated Democrats may have thought of the avowed policy of the party twelve or twenty years ago, it is now clear that that policy has never been put in practice; or that, if it ever was the practice, it has for many years ceased to be, and that it will never be again. I have shown what proportion of the public lands were sold, and what proportion were given away, during the last fiscal year. During preceding years, the donations were still larger in proportion to the sales. Under the convenient name of swamp lands, nearly every foot of the public domain in the Southern and Western States have been given to those Commonwealths.

The last annual report of the Land Office Commissioner shows that, between March 2, 1849, and September 30, 1859, the enormous amount of 56,634,000 acres of land have been given away under the designation of "swamp lands."

If these lands are good for nothing, the States would not be so anxious to receive them. If they are valuable, but need draining, the Federal Government is able to bear the expense; and, for the sake of the public health, as well as for the advantage of the Treasury, it should, in conformity with its favorite policy, have drained and sold them. How can either of the old parties which voted away these lands to particular States, reconcile their conduct with their avowed policy? If the public lands are the property of the country at large, on what principle of equity were 3,259,000 acres given to Illinois, 4,343,000 acres to Missouri, 11,256,000 acres to Louisiana, 7,273,000 acres to Michigan, 8,652,000 acres to Arkansas, and 11,790,000 acres to Florida? Whigs and Democrats voted for these enormous grants to the States, without a constitutional scruple. Northern men and Southern men voted for them. There was no sectional issue when the proposition was to give the lands to the States, to be managed by the politicians for the advantage of parties and classes; but the moment we propose to give the lands to the people, to the actual settlers, Southern men hold up their hands in horror, and exclaim against agrarian laws.

I have stated, on the authority of the last annual report of the Land Office Commissioner, that 56,000,000 acres of land have been given to the States, under the designation of swamp lands. But this is only one exhibition of Federal munificence to the States. I find in the annual report of the Commissioner for December, 1857, that up to that period 24,247,335 acres of land had been granted under various acts of Congress passed since 1850, to the

States, for the construction of certain railroads. I am unable to say whether additional grants of the same kind have been made since the date of that report. Nearly all these grants to railroad corporations have been made since the inauguration of President Pierce, and received his sanction. Whether the present President has given his assent to any similar measures, I am unable to say; but, at any rate, the party which elected him, and which sustains him, is responsible for them. They have no scruple in giving millions to States, or rather into the hands of political managers, and other millions to wealthy corporations, but they are shocked at the thought of giving lands to the landless people of the country. Is it not clear that the party platforms have only served as a pretext for keeping the public lands out of the hands of the people? When sold for cash, which happens to about one acre in five, they as often as otherwise fall into the hands of wealthy speculators residing in the great cities. These speculators never dream of spending a dollar for the benefit of the country whose soil they monopolize. They calmly wait for poor men to settle around the lands they have purchased, and thus render them valuable, when they enter into other men's labors and become rich, without striking a blow, by a cheap investment in wild lands.

The lands donated to railroad companies answer a useful end; but they also are held out of market, in order, at a future day, to be rendered valuable by the progress of settlements around them. It is thus the fate of the honest laboring masses to be imposed upon and speculated upon, whether the public lands are sold to capitalists, or donated to the States for the construction of railroads. The policy which has been pursued by this professedly Democratic Government has been literally to make the honest farmers and laborers "hewers of wood and drawers of water" for their more fortunate fellow-citizens, who have money, or credit, or political influence, to procure land grants.

Sir, I think it is about time to change this policy. The Democratic policy has now been ostensibly in operation since the foundation of the Government, and its effect has been, to make the rich richer, and the poor poorer. Now, let us try the Republican policy, which is to give the public lands to actual settlers, in tracts of one hundred and sixty acres each. Whoever chooses to reside five years on a quarter section of the public domain will amply repay the Government for it, since he will be a pioneer of civilization and Christianity; he will, to that extent, curtail the area of the savage wilderness, and limit the territory to be defended by the army. He will become a sentinel on the outposts of civilization, and his compensation will be not more than adequate to the service he will render his country. Sir, the idea of giving away the public domain to the people is no new one. Indeed, I incline

to the opinion that the idea of selling them is new. The first settlers on this continent, we are informed by history, received the most magnificent donations of land from those who had no right to give them—namely, the monarchs of Europe. The Court favorites were munificently endowed with provinces and principalities, and these favorites, I believe, subgranted them to actual settlers, at nominal prices, or at no price whatever.

The Norman conquerors of England, and the Goth and Vandal conquerors of Southern Europe, we are told, divided the conquered countries between the officers. The feudal system was a homestead law; but, unfortunately, it only provided homes for the great men, the generals and principal officers, and left the poor in a condition of slavery. The ancient Roman Republic was in the habit of making small allotments of land to the common people. At a later period, when the aristocracy or patrician order had grown unduly strong in the government, this plan of giving lands to the common people was abandoned; and when the Gracchi endeavored to pass a law, or rather to revive an old law, for the distribution of public lands among the common people, *in order that they might be cultivated by freemen, instead of slaves*, their patriotic efforts were resisted with the greatest violence by the patricians. Sir, is it not singular that the very same issue should again arise, in another hemisphere, after the lapse of two thousand years? It seems a literal verification of Solomon's saying, that "there is nothing new under the sun."

If we go to the great cities, and see thousands of men and women crowded together, like pigs in a sty; if we reflect that their great numbers furnish a supply of labor out of all proportion to the demand; and that this undue competition for employment has reduced them to poverty and to vice, do we not wonder why such things are to be witnessed in a country which has a territory half as large as Europe without inhabitants? Is it wise, is it humane, is it just, to withhold from these people lands which have remained untilld, perhaps, since the dawn of creation? By giving them away, we change the wilderness into fruitful fields; we increase the productive capacity of the land; we set thousands of idle hands to work; we enhance the wages of labor in the Eastern cities, by diverting the excess of laborers into new channels of employment, and we create new markets in the West for the manufactures of the East.

It is a great mistake to suppose that the development and settlement of the West will be injurious to the Eastern States. A little reflection will satisfy us that emigration westward, so far from injuring the East, by draining off its population, is the very thing to make the East great and prosperous. What would New York, and Boston, and Philadelphia, and Bal-

timore, be to-day, but for the constant tide of emigration that has for more than half a century flown westward? Where would be their markets for their manufactures and their importations from abroad, if the great West had not been settled? The emigrants from New England, New York, and Pennsylvania, from Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas, to the Mississippi valley and to the Pacific shores, have made the Erie canal, the Central and Erie railroads, the Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia railroad connections with the Ohio necessary. Without emigration to the West, these great highways of our internal commerce would never have existed; the manufactures of New England, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, would never have been heard of; and the commerce of New York would have remained what it was sixty years ago.

The homestead law, instead of injuring the Eastern States by drawing off their population, will give to them new life and enterprise. The unemployed will find employment; the homeless will find homes; manufactures and commerce will be invigorated by the new markets which will be opened in the immense and fertile regions which remain to be settled.

The history of the world has been a history of injustice and oppression of the poor. The rulers of the world have ruled for their own advantage, and the rights and interests of the people have been sacrificed without scruple on the altar of individual ambition, or to promote the welfare of a favored few. But a better day is dawning. The era of kings and oppressors is passing away, and the era of the people is approaching. Governments are now instituted professedly for the benefit of the governed, and there is reason to hope that the day is not distant when the universal diffusion of knowledge and the freedom of the press and of speech will reduce theoretical justice and equality to practice.

Sir, is it not a shame and a reproach to a Government like ours, which professes to be a Government of the people, that it should contain, at one and the same time, millions of families without house and home, and a thousand million acres of land which have not known the plow, or seed-time and harvest, since they came forth fresh from the Creator's hand?

On the first page of the Bible, we read the patent by which the Almighty gave the land to man:

"And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the

fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them; and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

We are again told that, after the flood,

"God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea: into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. * * * And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein."

Such, sir, is the language of the Bible, and it is equally the language of reason and philosophy. Every rational being must feel its force and authority. For his sins, man was turned forth from the garden of God, and told to go out and redeem himself by converting the whole earth into a garden. It was a merciful sentence. Happy will he be when, through labor and sorrow, through patience and effort, he shall have extirpated the thorns and thistles, the savage beasts and poisonous reptiles, which are but the outward symbols of his inward moral evils. Shall Governments interpose obstacles to the fulfilment of the Divine commands? Above all, shall a Government of the people annul the patent right which the Almighty has given to every man to cultivate the earth?

It is worthy of remark, that the Divine gift of the earth was made, not to rulers, not to a favored few, but to man—that is, to mankind. Human Governments have appropriated the lands, and dole them out to the people at a price—generally at such a price as the poor cannot pay—or else the Governments have bestowed the lands upon the most worthless part of mankind—namely, Court favorites. But in the beginning it was not so. We are told by sacred history that God had no Court favorites, no favored class, and that He gave the whole earth, without money and without price, to mankind, on the condition that they should subdue it and cultivate it.

